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Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2010

Draft report

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Meetings management: improved utilization of conference-services and facilities

A. Utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

Meeting statistics of United Nations organs and consultations with/letters to bodies concerning utilization of conference-servicing resources

Introduction and overview

At its 506th meeting on 30 August 2010, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences containing statistical data and analysis of the planned and actual utilization of conference resources allocated to a core sample of bodies that met in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi in 2009 (see A/65/122, paras. 10-13 and annex III).

The overall utilization factor for all four duty stations in 2009 was 86 per cent (85 per cent in 2008). Meeting cancellations remained high in New York compared to other duty stations. Late cancellations of meetings and cancellation of certain language combinations for interpretation had in some cases caused disruption in capacity planning.

The Committee also heard an oral report by the Chair on her mandate to hold consultations with the four intergovernmental bodies that had utilized less than the benchmark of 80 per cent of their allocated resources for three consecutive years. A meeting was held with the Chair of the Committee on Contributions. As a result of more accurate planning, early cancellations and optimum utilization of time, the Commission on Population and Development and the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and its Working Group had already improved their utilization factor above the benchmark in 2010. A meeting is scheduled in October

Please recycle

with the Chair of the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization.

Discussion

For Nairobi, the decrease in the utilization factor from 100 per cent in 2008 to 90 per cent in 2009 resulted from more standardized statistical reporting which now recorded time lost as a result of late starts, early endings and cancellations of meetings.

B. Provision of interpretation services to meetings of bodies entitled to meet "as required"

Introduction and overview

At the same meeting the Committee also considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning the provision of interpretation services to meetings of "as required" bodies (see A/65/122, para. 14 and annex IV). A comparative analysis showed an increase in provision of services in New York to 95 per cent in 2009; for the period 1 January to 31 May 2010, 98 per cent of such requests had been met. For the first time, Geneva was reporting that category of meetings; 95 per cent of the requests for interpretation services had been met in 2009.

C. Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States

Introduction and overview

Also at its 506th meeting, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning the provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States (see A/65/122, paras. 15 and 16 and annex V).

Discussion

The significant progress being made in provision of services to meetings of regional groups was welcomed. A representative of the Secretariat said that the improvement could be attributed to increased predictability in the meetings of regional groups at the ambassadorial level, which had been a major factor. As soon as the programmes of work for the Security Council and General Assembly became available, regional groups could be informed of the availability of services, often one or even two days in advance of a planned meeting. One delegation asked for an explanation of the rise in demand in Geneva, resulting in only 61 per cent of requests being met in 2009, as well as for statistics for Nairobi and Vienna. A representative of the Secretariat said that in Geneva, "as required" meetings of the Human Rights Council took priority when allocating available capacity. Nairobi and Vienna did not have available capacity and therefore did not service meetings of regional groupings.

D. Utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

At the same meeting, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning utilization of the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (see A/65/122, para. 17). It was noted with satisfaction that in 2009 all meetings of Nairobi-based bodies had been held in Nairobi, in conformity with the headquarters rule.

Utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa

Introduction and overview

At the same meeting, the Committee considered the section of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences concerning the utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa (see A/65/122, paras. 18 and 19). In 2009, the utilization rate of the conference centre had remained at 76 per cent. Owing to increased competition in the local and regional markets, an improvement in the centre's utilization rate might not be realistically sustainable in the next few years. Marketing activities of the centre included participation in high-profile international conventions and exhibitions. Among new steps being taken to ensure sustainability of the occupancy rate achieved in 2009, the centre had established partnerships with the Addis Ababa Tourism Commission, Ethiopian Airlines and other stakeholders to sell Addis Ababa as a conference and tourism destination.

Discussion

Further information was requested on efforts to market the conference centre, the results of the most recent assessment of the condition of the facilities and any timetable for their refurbishment, and on the cost/benefit analysis that had led to a reduction in the size of the new conference building under construction by one floor. In addition, information on the most recent security assessment and any remedial measures planned would be helpful.